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No. 276

THE MATCHMAKER

A Comedy in One Act

BY

EVERETT HENRY RUPERT

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no1

THE MATCH-MAKER.

CHARACTERS.

RODNEY BURKETT.....*The match-maker*
PYGMALION VON HUTTON (*dubbed* "PIGGIE") *His protégé*
CAROLINE DEVOE.....*His friend*

SCENE:—*Living room of* RODNEY'S *bachelor apartments, New York City.*

TIME:—*A spring morning.*

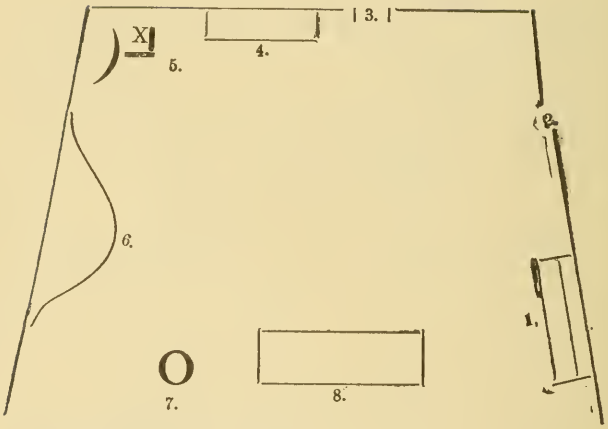
TIME OF PLAYING:—*About nineteen minutes.*

PERSONAL PROPERTIES.

Letter and small envelope for Rodney. Tie, collar and newspaper for Piggie. Hand-bag, gloves and parasol for Caroline.

(1) Fire-place, with mantle. (2) Portiered doorway, leading into sleeping apartment. (3) Practical door, with hall backing. (4) Couch, with pillows disarranged; at one end lies Piggie's hat. (5) Straight-backed chair, over which is hung Piggie's coat and vest. (6) Chiffonier, with mirror. On the chiffonier, among other things, is an empty cigarette-case. (7) "Comfy" chair. (8) Table, littered with books, magazines and papers, several of which have fallen to the floor. Rugs, pictures, bric-a-brac. General air of disordered elegance.

SCENE PLOT



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THE MATCH-MAKER.

SCENE:—*At rise,* RODNEY BURKETT *is discovered down* L. *reading note which he has just drawn from small envelope.* BURKETT *is a gray-haired, strong-featured, well-preserved man of the world. In spite of his fifty-odd years, he has succeeded in preserving his youth, not only in appearance, but in spirit and action as well; at times he is prone to be boyish. He fully appreciates his responsibility as guardian of* PIGGIE, *however, and can contemplate the serious aspects of life with more discernment, and with a better grace, than can many of his kind. Possessed of fine sensibilities, he is a natural enemy to disorder, and takes advantage of every opportunity to "straighten things up." This characteristic is especially noticeable in his dress and personal appearance. On this particular morning, he appears in a spring suit of the prevailing color and style.*)

RODNEY. (*as he concludes reading note, calls eagerly*) Piggie! Piggie! Oh, Piggie!

PIGGIE. (*from room off* L.; *impatiently*) Well, well?

RODNEY. Are you awake, old man?

(PIGGIE *enters in shirt-sleeves, tie and collar in hand, and crosses to chiffonier,* R. *He is a handsome, well-built youth of twenty, possessing an abundance of nervous energy, and an*

ever-changing disposition, sunny one moment, and irascible the next. He is sensitive, but one whose grievances may be quickly condoned. He cares more for "fad" than style in dress, and dresses accordingly. He speaks as he enters.)

PIGGIE. No one ever accused me of talking in my sleep.

RODNEY. (*in mock surprise*) Well, well! Up and dressed, all by his dear, sweet, independent little self. Mamma's little boy is fast becoming a fine, big man.

PIGGIE. (*sourly*) Aw, cheese it!

RODNEY. (*is perplexed. Is in the habit of practising such cajolery on* PIGGIE, *and having it received and returned in the proper spirit; so when he speaks again, it is somewhat gravely*) What's the matter, old man—lost something?

PIGGIE. (*pauses in the act of slipping tie into collar and speaks with just a suspicion of sarcasm in his voice*) Yes, I lost a step over there by the door as I came in. Would you mind——

RODNEY. (*with gentle severity*) Didn't you lose your manners also, Piggie? (*with kindly sympathy*) What is it, old chap? Tell it to *me*—maybe I can——

PIGGIE. (*shortly*) It's nothing—nothing—absolutely nothing!

RODNEY. (*leans against table supporting himself with his hands; good-naturedly*) I guess our "evening out" last night didn't agree with you, did it, boy?

(PIGGIE *mumbles something to himself.*)

RODNEY. (*treating it all as a joke*) Do you know, at the Gaiety, you were as morose as a dramatic critic; and afterwards, at Sherry's, you were

positively rude—yes you were, you rascal; once or twice I was quite ashamed of you. I fairly ex-

hausted myself trying to cheer you up; but when I found that nothing would move your grouch, I concluded my evening at entertaining had been a rank failure, and brought you home, hoping you'd sleep it off. But, look at you! (*lays note carefully on table, goes to* PIGGIE *and places his arm gently about the boy's shoulders*) What is it, sonny? Come on, tell your old pal what's gone wrong.

PIGGIE. (*shaking him off; impatiently*) It's nothing, I tell you; nothing's gone wrong—that is—anyway, it isn't so bad but what I'll get over it.

RODNEY. (*slapping him on the back*) Of course you'll get over it. We all get these spells sometimes. (*goes back* L. *and begins straightening up room*) Now, pull yourself together, quick, and help me straighten up this room, for oh, Piggie-boy—(*picking up note from table*) what—do—you—think?

PIGGIE. (*in a little better humor as he removes vest from back of chair and proceeds to put it on before glass*) I'm trying to learn not to think, Rodney; I've found it a bad habit.

RODNEY. (*in ecstasy, forgetting everything else*) She's coming to see us, Piggie—here—this morning.

PIGGIE. (*making a botch of trying to appear interested*) Is she?

RODNEY. (*rolling his eyes heavenward*) Oh-h! Just wait till you see her.

PIGGIE. (*nonchalantly*) I intended to wait.

RODNEY. (*soulfully*) You'll simply di-e-e——

PIGGIE. I think I'll not wait.

RODNEY. (*hastily*) Oh, no, I didn't mean that, Piggie; of course not. (*relapsing into his former beatific mode of expression*) But, oh-h, boy—oh—boy, she's a—she's a dr-eam-m-m!

PIGGIE. (*taking coat from chair and repeating*

business before mirror) I need something more tangible, Rodney—breakfast for instance.

RODNEY. (*indignantly*) Breakfast! For shame! Forget it, lad, forget it. (*again rolling his eyes heavenward*) You'll forget everything when you see *her*.

PIGGIE. (*definitely*) I'm going.

RODNEY. Oh, no! I didn't mean that—don't be a fool, boy—you see, you didn't—ah—ah—Confound it, Piggie, why don't you ask who she is?

PIGGIE. You once told me that when I got curious to stretch my ears as far as I liked, but to keep my mouth *shut*, so I——

RODNEY. (*despairingly*) Oh, I know—that's quite the proper way—usually; but don't you see, this is someone special.

PIGGIE. (*dryly*) It must be to warrant such a fuss.

RODNEY. (*reminiscently*) Someone I have wanted you to know for years; someone I've often pictured as being your—ah—a very dear friend of yours; someone I've— But what's the use? There's no two ways about it. Fate intended you for each other. I tell you, you'll fall in love with her at first sight.

PIGGIE. (*smiling significantly at his reflection in the glass*) Oh, *will* I?

RODNEY. But you can't help yourself. She's a perfect je-e-m!

PIGGIE. (*fussing nervously with his clothes*) Possibly; but I'm not a bit fond of jewelry.

RODNEY. (*exasperated*) Oh, you ass! You've *got* to fall in love with her, I tell you.

PIGGIE. (*turning his head*) *Got* to?

RODNEY. (*supplicating*) Please fall in love with her, Piggie.

PIGGIE. If she's all you say she is, she could never bring herself to care for a knock-about like

me; and even if she could—oh, it would be impossible, Rodney.

RODNEY. (*pricking up his ears—figuratively speaking, of course*) Why impossible?

PIGGIE. Because I—well, just because.

RODNEY. (*leaning against table again; soberly*) "Just because" is a woman's reason, Piggie.

PIGGIE. (*with impatient celerity*) Because I'm in love with somebody else.

RODNEY. (*a trifle sternly*) What's that?

PIGGIE. See? I knew it would be that way.

RODNEY. But you don't seem to understand, Piggie; this is—(*abruptly*) Who's the girl?

PIGGIE. (*irritably, tugging at his garments*) Why, it's a friend of mine; you don't know her.

RODNEY. But I want to know; I have a right to know.

PIGGIE. (*turning; a trifle hotly*) What right, pray?

RODNEY. (*tenderly*) The right your father gave me, Piggie, when he turned you over to me just before he died and said: "Look after my boy, Rodney—bring him up right. Steer him clear of the dark places, and teach him how to live so that the world will be proud of him." I've been doing my best for eighteen years, now, Piggie-boy, and—

PIGGIE. (*crosses down to* RODNEY, *offering his hand in apology*) I guess I've acted the brute, Rodney. I didn't intend—I don't want you to think I'm ungrateful, because—I appreciate all you've done. But——

RODNEY. (*drawing him close and giving him an affectionate shake*) But what, lad?

PIGGIE. You wouldn't understand, Rodney—it's so unusual. I——

RODNEY. (*giving him another shake*) Hurry up; out with it, boy.

(PIGGIE *remains silent.*)

RODNEY. (*in a tone more gentle*) Where did you first see her?

PIGGIE. At the Casino.

RODNEY. At a box-party?

PIGGIE. No.

RODNEY. Oh, just met her in the crowd, eh?

PIGGIE. No.

RODNEY. (*perplexed*) Then I can't—you didn't—(*light dawning in his face*) You don't mean on——

PIGGIE. Yes—that's it.

RODNEY. (*rebukingly*) Piggie!

PIGGIE. (*drawing away from him*) See? I knew you wouldn't understand.

RODNEY. (*pulling him back gently*) Come here! Was it—was it one of the principals?

PIGGIE. No.

RODNEY. Oh-h, a chorus girl.

PIGGIE. Yes. (*drawing away again*)

RODNEY. (*pulling him back*) Wait a minute, lad; let's get at the bottom of this thing. How did you happen to—to meet her?

PIGGIE. Bobby Gray introudced me after the show. She's a friend of Bobby's sister.

RODNEY. Oh!

PIGGIE. Then we had lunch at Rector's.

RODNEY. So every night, except last night, you have been——

PIGGIE. At the Casino——

RODNEY. And——

PIGGIE. Rector's.

RODNEY. (*releasing* PIGGIE, *who retires to the other side of the room; after a pause*) I'm beginning to understand last night's grouch.

PIGGIE. (*in a tone of surprise*) Well, aren't you going to——

RODNEY. (*with a laugh*) Scold you—condemn you? There seems to be no occasion for either, young man. You have——

PIGGIE. (*returns to* RODNEY *and grasps his hand earnestly*) Oh, thank you, Rodney.

RODNEY. (*pressing his hand warmly*) Not at all, my boy. I was young myself—once. I know all about these chorus girl episodes—just how far they go, and how long they last. But I know some other things, too, Piggie, that I want you to know, before you make a mistake you'll be liable to regret all your life.

PIGGIE. (*in suspense*) Well?

RODNEY. Have all the good, clean fun you want, my boy. Have just as big a time as your allowance for that purpose will permit. Enjoy yourself, and be a joy to others—that's what that dear daddy of yours would have said—but don't— *don't,* Piggie, allow yourself to become serious.

PIGGIE. But what if my heart——

RODNEY. You're too young to have a heart, lad; and even if you're not, it isn't wise to jump headlong into a thing like this until you've made sure of the depth.

PIGGIE. (*turning away disgusted*) Good Lord! One would think you were talking to a child!

RODNEY. No, my boy. But if you were older, and had had a little more experience, you would be able to discriminate more distinctly between *love* and *infatuation.*

PIGGIE. Infatuation! Rot!

RODNEY. Isn't that it, boy?

PIGGIE. (*emphatically*) No!

RODNEY. Aren't you merely infatuated with a butterfly of the moment?

PIGGIE. (*hotly*) I'll thank you not to allude to her as a butterfly. Just because she's a chorus girl——

RODNEY. But, listen, Piggie——

PIGGIE. I'll not listen if you're going to insult her. She's just as good and true and pure as any

girl that ever lived—and I'll make it damned hot for any one who says she isn't.

RODNEY. (*imperiously*) Piggie! ! !—You will please be careful not to repeat that outbreak. You are going—to stand right there, now, and look at this thing calmly and with reason. When I spoke of this—of your friend as a butterfly, I made no allusion to her qualities, good or bad. I have lived long enough, and have had sufficient experience, to know that chorus girls are not only not half as bad as they are painted, but, in a majority of cases, are as good and clean as girls in any other walk of life. I do not question the goodness and virtue of your chorus girl friend, Piggie—not for a minute. But I want to try to make you realize that the world at large have no opportunity to see these things from the inside as we see them. One chorus girl becomes involved in a big scandal and (*with a shrug*) they're all like her—that's what the world says. Can't you see, then, what it would mean to you if you should allow yourself to treat this—this little affair seriously? Jones meets Smith on the street and casually inquires what's become of Piggie Von Hutton. And Smith is surprised, and asks: "What! Haven't you heard? Why, the poor devil married a chorus girl."

PIGGIE. (*grimly*) Then you can bet I'd take advantage of the first opportunity to tell Jones and Smith where they could head in at. I'd know them, then, for just what they were—contemptuous, narrow-minded, bigoted fools——

RODNEY. (*quietly*) Do you realize that you are calling me a narrow-minded, bigoted fool, Piggie?

PIGGIE. (*passionately*) You wouldn't sneer at my marriage with a chorus girl if you knew we loved each other, Rodney Burkett!

RODNEY. (*slowly*) For your own sake, Piggie, and because I think so much of you, I would do everything in my power to prevent—that—marriage.

PIGGIE. (*incredulously, after a pause*) You—would!

RODNEY. (*softly*) Yes, Piggie—I would.

PIGGIE. (*regaining his equipoise*) Then you'd better be up and doing, Rodney Burkett—(*grabbing hat*) for I'm going to her *now*. I'll get a marriage license and marry her before noon—and I'd like to see you prevent it—if you can.

(*Exits, slamming door.*)

RODNEY. (*after slight pause, during which he gazes affectionately toward door through which* PIGGIE *has just made his exit*) God bless that boy! Before he reaches the corner he'll repent of having lost his temper, and will be hurrying back to tell old Rodney how sorry he is.

(*Knock at door in Flat.*)

RODNEY. (*immediately on the alert*) That's she. (*hurries quietly to mirror to assure himself that he is presentable*)

(*Knock is repeated.*)

RODNEY. (*takes a deep breath and calls*) Come in!

CAROLINE. (*opens door and puts head in*) Well!

(*She steps inside.* CAROLINE *is an extremely attractive girl of about nineteen. Sweet, simple, unaffected. She wears a new spring bonnet, and a natty street costume.*)

RODNEY. (*goes to her and presses her hands warmly*) Caroline—Miss DeVoe!

CAROLINE. How do you do, Mr. Burkett?

RODNEY. Tickled to death to see you. How fine you look!

CAROLINE. (*simply*) Thank you.

RODNEY. (*leads way to "comfy" chair down* R., *where he makes a great fuss about arranging pillows, etc.*) Well, come in, sit down, lay off your wraps——

CAROLINE. Oh, my time is very limited, Rodney—Mr. Burkett——

RODNEY. (*taking her things from rather reluctant hands and carrying them up to couch at back*) That's right—call me Rodney. Two old friends like us needn't be so conventional, need we? Let's see—how long is it—one—almost two years since I was down at your place, isn't it?

CAROLINE. Almost. I've been in New York a little over a year, you know——

RODNEY. (*in great surprise*) Been in New York——

CAROLINE. Or didn't you know?

RODNEY. (*appealing heavenward*) Ye gods, hear that, now! (*sinking on couch*) In New York a little over— But, why haven't you been around to see us before?

CAROLINE. Oh, I have been very busy studying—I came to study voice, you know; but I did manage to steal an afternoon off once, and looked you up at the address you gave me when you were down in the country, but you had moved, and nobody seemed to know anything about you. It was only yesterday that I learned from Helen Gray—it seems she's heard her brother speak of you—where you were. But, oh, I had such a fright as I came up!

RODNEY. (*solicitously*) A fright? Why, Caroline, what——

CAROLINE. It was in that dark hall-way, below. I had got right into the middle of it—in the very darkest place—when some one came tearing along like one fleeing from a plague. He came within an ace of crashing into me and upsetting both of us.

(*suddenly horrified, as the full import of such a catastrophe dawns upon her*) Oh, Heavens, Rodney! What if he had!

RODNEY. (*considering it a great joke*) Oh, ho, Caroline! That must have been Piggie.

CAROLINE. (*vaguely*) Piggie?

RODNEY. Yes. Don't you know, I've told you about Piggie lots of times—finest boy in the world. Why, when you met him, he was going to his wedding.

CAROLINE. Wedding?

RODNEY. So he said. You see—(*apologetically*) he and I just had a rumpus. He thinks he's in love with a chorus girl, and declares he'll marry her whether or no. Isn't it a pity when a nice, bright young man like that gets those silly notions into his head?

CAROLINE. Why, if she's a nice chorus girl——

RODNEY. Oh, she's a good square girl, all right—Piggie's too much of a man to lose his senses over any other kind—but—it's the looks of the thing, Caroline. Think what his friends would say—those who are expecting such big things of him—if he were to tie himself up to a common chorus girl.

CAROLINE. But, some chorus girls——

RODNEY. (*argumentatively, as he gets up and goes* L., *near fire-place where he kicks down the upturned corner of a rug*) Oh, they never get anywhere, Caroline. Perhaps one in five thousand come to the front. I heard a boy crying the news this morning—something about a chorus girl becoming a prima donna over night—but that's very unusual. And, anyway, Piggie would never be lucky enough to——

PIGGIE. (*shouting exuberantly without*) Rodney! Rodney!

(CAROLINE *rises, looking expectantly at* RODNEY.)

PIGGIE. (*bursts into room flourishing newspaper*) Rodney, look at— (*stops short at seeing* CAROLINE. *Confusion for both*) Oh, I beg pardon——

RODNEY. Take off you hat, Piggie, and make a bow to the lady. Miss DeVoe, my youthful protege, Mr. Pygmalion Von Hutton.

(*They smile into each other's eyes as they acknowledge the introduction.*)

RODNEY. Miss DeVoe is the young lady of whom you have so often heard me speak, Piggie. I want yop to try to cultivate her acquaintance. (*over his shoulder as he crosses to chiffonier, apparently to get a cigarette from his cigarette-case, which he finds empty, but in reality, to throw the burden of entertaining one another upon the young people*) You'll like her immensely.

PIGGIE. (*coming down in front of table grinning broadly*) No doubt about that, Rodney, I——

CAROLINE. (*going up and taking her things from couch*) I believe I must be going——

RODNEY. (*swinging around*) Oh, don't hurry away, Caroline. Stay and get acquainted with Piggie. He's a real interesting sort of a chap—ah—after you get to know him.

CAROLINE. (*smiling at* PIGGIE) If Mr. "Piggie" will excuse me this time, I will see you both again to-night—that is—(*to* RODNEY) if you will accept my invitation to a box-party at the Casino.

RODNEY. (*down back of "comfy" chair*) Well, that surely is lovely of you, Caroline. I am sure Piggie and I will be delighted to— I say, Caroline, where did you say you were going to have that box-party—at the Casino?

CAROLINE. (*roguishly*) Yes, the Casino.

RODNEY. (*disconcerted*) Well, really, Caro-

line, I—we—ah—couldn't you change it to some other house? You see, Piggie has been attending the Casino quite regularly of late, and by so doing has contracted a very serious form of heart-trouble. It really isn't good for him to go so often. Couldn't you arrange for Maude Adams, or—the Hippodrome, or——

CAROLINE. I am very sorry, Rodney, but it would be quite impossible to change it. You see, my contract reads, "the Casino."

RODNEY. (*perplexed*) Contract?

CAROLINE. Yes—for an indefinite number of performances—that being at the option of the management.

RODNEY. Performances—contract—m a n a g e ment— But, I don't——

PIGGIE. (*catching up newspaper from table where he has thrown it, and thrusting it into* RODNEY'S *face*) You old rummie, get busy and read your morning's paper. There—(*showing him*) those headlines.

RODNEY. (*reading*) "Chorus Girl Becomes Prima Donna Over Night. Leading Woman Falls Ill and Understudy— (*turning to them*) But, say, you don't mean——

PIGGIE. (*contemptuously*) Of course, Rodney, can't you see? Miss DeVoe is the prima donna—the ex-chorus girl who has set all New York talking——

RODNEY. (*his brain in a whirl*) What's that?

PIGGIE. She's the one I've been taking to Rector's. We've been——

RODNEY. Well, Ju—das— Is that true, Caroline.

CAROLINE. (*laughing*) I guess we're guilty, Rodney.

RODNEY. Well, suffering—! But, say, I don't—how did you——

CAROLINE. Don't you remember, I told you I

came to New York to study voice? Then the chance for the chorus came; and I begged so hard they gave me the understudy also. Then, last night—well, you know the rest.

RODNEY. Ye gods! And you two——

PIGGIE. (*exultingly*) Ah, ha, Rodney! I believe you said this morning you would never consent to my marrying a chorus girl!

RODNEY. (*gravely*) Nor shall I, Piggie. If he'll have you at all, you will be marrying, not the chorus girl, but (*bowing to* CAROLINE) the prima donna.

CURTAIN.

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